

The times that try the souls of us all

THE ASSASSINATIONS:

Dallas and Beyond

By Peter Dale Scott,
Paul Hoch & Russell Stetler

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Reviewed by
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"The Assassinations" is a collection of critiques of official versions of the murders of public figures. Its selections were chosen from works by the leading contributors to assassination literature, including Mark Lane, Sylvia Meagher, Josiah Thompson, and Harold Weisberg, with bits from Jack Anderson, Gore Vidal, Tad Szulc, E. Howard Hunt and Lyndon Johnson.

Reading through this potpourri is a strange experience, with more questions raised than answered. The questions raised are not always the ones the compilers of this guide to cover-ups and investigations want the reader to ask.

The first section of the book, about three-fifths of its pages, deals with the assassination of John F. Kennedy. This section's four chapters include discussions of the Warren Commission Report and its failings, examination of new evidence since the report was published, six different reconstructions of the events at Dealey Plaza and a chapter called "The Commission, The Critics and The Press."

While most now believe that the Warren Commission's version leaves a good deal to be desired, the critics' versions of the assassination are even more confused and contradictory. Most of them would have us believe that Oswald was innocent. They contend that he was framed, but they never answer by whom, for what purposes and how. One researcher purports to prove Oswald's innocence through a stress-machine analysis of a few Oswald sentences that were taped while he was in the Dallas jail.

Another critic claims that for the Warren Commission's contention that Oswald alone shot Kennedy to hold water, the commission had to prove that Oswald also shot Officer Tippit shortly after the president was murdered. This critic claims that eyewitness descriptions of Tippit's killer are at variance not only with each other but with Oswald's appearance that day.

Much is made of a home movie shot by Abraham Zapruder who, coming to see the President's triumphal tour, had inadvertently recorded his murder. In the film, Kennedy's head is seen to move sharply backward after he received a fatal head wound. One set of critics says that this head wound could only come from a bullet fired from in front of Kennedy. Another group insists that the shot was fired from behind Kennedy and that propulsion from brain fragments moved the president's head backward. All the critics claim that Kennedy was shot by more than one assassin, though none can name the other culprits or agree on their location.

The effect of reading this portion of "The Assassinations" is to make the original skeptic more respectful of the Warren Commission report. In contrast with the critics' versions, the report offers a simple and coherent explanation.

The second portion of the book deals with the assassinations of Robert Kennedy and the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. It also details the relationships between Watergate and assassination figures. A spotlight is turned on the shadowy activities of the nation's secret police and intelligence communities and their ties with the underworld. It delineates some of the criminal plots hatched by an unholy alliance against Castro and speculates on the connection between these activities and the death of the President.

The suspicions aroused by this portion of the book have less to do with the commission's reconstruction of the events at Dallas and more to do with the motivation that propelled the assassination. This segment of the book also creates profound doubt about the ability of a democratic society to long endure in a nation where policy is increasingly influenced by the CIA, FBI and military intelligence.

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